Punk Rock

So.

I'm in the shower, aware that if I start belting out the All song in my head at 6:30am the two people in the attached bedroom will surely complain. This does nothing to curb my enthusiasm.

Writing, like all artistic endeavors, involves the ability to fantasize to a degree much greater than a life spent as an accountant. Professional quality. A daydream intense enough to use as a legal defense for multiple homicide. All (heh) this energy has to go somewhere.

....and there I am, taking a shower in an alley in a city I've never been in, certainly not in Texas, under a garden hose in freezing cold. The mumbled backstory has something to do with a problem on the flight there. (I have never been on a plane.) The water spigot is technically not from the venue I am due to perform some sort of reading or spoken word performance at, but across the trash-strewn alley stemming from the grease trap oozing restaurant that could be serving any kind of cuisine imaginable. The smells of cookery are so generic it is impossible to discern if it is even vegan or a hot wings and beer sports dive. Completely naked, yelling the All song that I am not yelling in my actual shower, my backpack and guitar bag by the loading dock of the club. I am aware that the concrete and brick edifices are brightly lit with yellowed sodium arc security lights. Pools of rapidly cooling murk sloshed by the eatery staff are steaming in the below freezing night air.

While I'm still using a spare t-shirt to scrub whatever was so urgent I had to get it off of my body that instant, a woman wearing boots well past her knees with a Bettie Page hairstyle tells me that her guitarist has just chosen this exact moment to call and quit the band and that they're due on stage in fifteen minutes. Would I fill in?

She doesn't ask if I know who they are and I don't ask to find out if I know who they are. Yeah, I'm in. Nothing can go wrong on stage. Turns out it was formerly an all-female quartet. I have my handmade guitar, which still has tuning issues and maybe not the most reliable electronics due to my insistence on scavenging parts from sources like old projection televisions, and I can plug directly into the PA using a couple borrowed pedals as preamps. It is an opening set of thirty minutes with drums, bass, me, and a singer. There are also mics on stands on each side of center that are live, I notice after one falls and hits the floor, sending squealing feedback bouncing off the warehouse space's walls.

The set list has been hastily scrawled in handwriting mimicking the cloistered monk Gregory Peck visits in the original Omen film that directs him to the graveyard his infant son is buried in with a jackal as his mother. Being a punk show, there are around twenty songs to go through.

A screech. Bass and drums lurch in. The BPM is slower than anticipated and my right hand winds up naturally pounding downstrokes in double time compared to the rhythm section after watching the glow-in-the-dark painted nails on the Rickenbacker bass neck trace a run across the sharkfin inlays. It works. I shrug and resolve to do my best Paul Leary imitations half the time - solo runs instead of chords so I don't step on the bass as much. We didn't discuss tuning, not that it would have mattered after three songs since my instrument flatly refuses to do what it is told, like its owner. I had been experimenting with drop B while covering

the Rage Against the Machine version of Bob Dylan's Maggie's Farm last. My new partners in sonic terrorism seem to prefer standard tuning, which is ironically what I normally would be in.

It is cool. I got this. So do they. None of us exchanged names, so The Bassist has left her side of the stage and is keeping her back to everyone else, allowing me to check out what she's doing on the fretboard. Often in modern music, unless you're in Primus, the bass in somewhat mirroring the root notes of the chords being - in my case implied - by the guitar or keyboard. After observing the progressions with delayed palm mutes I launch into scale improvisations, which in my case are mostly less commonly used 'exotic' ones chosen for memory addition because they didn't have major or minor in their names.

Neither of us can make out what the singer is - there's no other word for it - screeching like a chorus of startled but enraged snow owls (the kind from the film Labyrinth) from where we're standing or probably anywhere else in the club, but there are definitely missed call-and-response sections being helpfully picked up by the audience.

Somewhere around track nine The Bassist, who has been leading the musicians, signals that whatever song we're on is going to become a half-time slow jam that will meander and lope until the next band shows up to relieve us by planting her feet widely and sliding her hallucinogenic nuclear death green tracers slowly up towards the headstock while falling over on her back with her right leg hooked over the upper horn - a hooked protrusion on the Ric jetglo (that's what the company calls black with a white pickguard - the tuxedo penguin version). We are illuminated demurely by strip blacklights. The official members are highlighted with responsive paint and I am shirtless, as usual, in black mesh gym shorts, which translates to me being all purple - a bald, psychedelic bridge troll escaped from a Helmet album cover with smears of dirty green in the face area where I keep gritting my chipped

and crooked teeth. If the volume were to cut out, grunts and low-pitched growls would accompany my predatory insistence that cabrito was near - though frustratingly across the alley.

From my perspective it is obvious what our musical bandleader's intention is - to give me an unadulterated view of the area between her legs, covered from the crowd by a black fabric knee-high skirt, now lurching side to side and up and down as her other leg is stretched out in a perpendicular angle underneath her. She is not wearing anything underneath, but the lighting is dim and there is no flourescent highlighting in this location, forming a dark royal triangle that has successfully diverted my attention from her nimble phalanges. The percussive beats are now not even close to falling in any kind of discernable pattern, and neither of our instruments are making an effort to follow in step, instead slimily snaking around each other in a mutual courtship ritual where danger exists - the kind where the male winds up thrusting away long after its head and upper thorax has been consumed by ravenous mandibles. Screeching has dissolved into indistinct whispers and moans, showcasing a side of vocal prowess usually reserved for the studio recordings.

A shiny buckle-top shoe inserts itself between the sole of my foot and the grimy gaffer-taped planking, not overpowering but sending my two-hundred-pound animated carcass decisively down hard on one knee, a bruise that will later match the LEDs glowing above us later. I take the time to observe that since I am in drop B, hitting the two lowest strings open makes a fifth chord, which I can do with my guitar lying on its back next to the insistent woman doing the same.

Only a percentage of the population can roll their tongues with the exterior edges curled upwards towards the roofs of their mouths. I am one of those numbers.

With my left arm firmly curled around her thigh, raised from the floor by the other foot she is sitting on, I start slurping sweat pouring down both of us from her asshole upwards, wrapping a string with agile tongue laterally before shaking my head violently like a mako tearing whale flesh, sending her non-blacklight responsive heavy tampon towards the amassed onlookers. It sticks to the Tolex-covered side of a Peavey wedge monitor before slowly making its way to the lip of the stage in graduated steps like a sticky child's toy sourced from a coin-operated vending machine.

My dream has shifted my lead role from starving artist to heroic crime scene investigator. Such is logic in these scenarios. Serving the people in my community, I dig in to my work, asking no questions, assuming nothing, but confidently feeling for answers, righteously assured justice is being served, and is far more delicate of flavor and delicious than anything the nondescript eatery whose faucet I borrowed could ever hope to offer.

....yeah!? What do you do in the shower?

[There's no car that I can't break

But there's no bus that I can take

So I'm walking, always walking

Body all rust, motor fried

Junkyard said they wouldn't give me a dime

Just turn over, for Christ's sake

Take a little ghost ride into the lake

You're history, fucking history

I'm scam a ride from my best friend

Something is wrong with my car again

-All

On Foot

Pummel album]